

March 5, 2006 - Iditarod Restart

Greetings from Skwentna,



Eighty-three mushers and teams are on the Iditarod Trail. Due to snow conditions, the restart was held at Willow rather than Wasilla. Skies were over cast with temperatures in the upper 20's, a little warm for the dogs but very pleasant for the spectators. Thousands of spectators gathered to cheer the teams on as they left the chute. I was fortunate enough to handle dogs for Tim Osmar. Tim is running as visual interpreter for Rachel Scdoris. There are two very incredible aspects at the start - the

focus of the musher and the excitement of the dogs. With eighty-three teams running 16 dogs each, there were more than 1,300 dogs!

The journey for WFTOTT™ also begins from Willow. I met my pilot Bruce who has plenty of Iditarod experience both as a musher and as a pilot for the Iditarod Air Force. We flew a short distance up the trail then landed to watch teams as they progressed toward Yentna Station, the first checkpoint. The plan was that I would fly out to Finger Lake but first set down at Skwentna to see the checkpoint. As often happens in Alaska, plans change quickly. The weather at Finger Lake was somewhat questionable so I stayed in Skwentna where there would be lots of action throughout the night as teams arrived at checkpoint number two.



Skwentna has a population of 111 and is located near the confluence of the Yentna and Skwentna Rivers. The checkpoint is on the river and the checkpoint cabin is up on a nearby bluff. There is a post office, the postmaster's home and the checkpoint cabin. Joe and Norma Dehlia reside at the checkpoint and run the post office year round. While visiting with the Vets, a bald eagle soared over-head and landed on the frozen river to inspect the drop bags. The eagle walked up and down the line of drop bags, inspecting each bag. It's amazing how graceful eagles are when

airborne but how awkward they appear on land.

The first team into Skwentna was Bryan Bearss at 9:14 pm followed by Judith Currier and Jessica Hendricks. Some mushers will stay at the checkpoint where they will rest their dogs and take a nap. Other teams will collect their heet, drop bags, and straw then continuing on to camp further up the trail where the dogs and musher can rest in a more peaceful environment. Being dark, it's a thrill to see the light from the musher's headlamps far down the river as the team approaches Skwentna. Who will the musher be?



During the race, I'll be selecting a piece of equipment for you to identify and decide its purpose. There are a variety of sleds on the trail right now. Can you name this type of sled? What is this sled best suited for?



Happy trails and stay tuned,
Terrie